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C O N F I D E N T I A L LA PAZ 002778

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TAGS: PGOV PREL PHUM BL

SUBJECT: INDIGENOUS COHESION CRACKING IN BOLIVIA

REF: LA PAZ 2104

Classified By: EcoPol Counselor Mike Hammer, reasons 1.4b,d

¶1. (C) Summary: On October 15, Emboffs met with Fabio Colquechuima, the international relations officer of CONAMAQ (National Council of Ayllus and Markas of Qollasuyu), a group consisting of 16 indigenous groups from across Bolivia, mostly concentrated in the highlands to the west. In what is becoming a recurring theme in embassy meetings with indigenous groups, Colquechuima commented that the ruling Movement Toward Socialism (MAS) government is "using" indigenous groups for its own aims while providing only lip-service to the actual cause of indigenous rights. Colquechuima complained that Venezuelan and Cuban financial support only goes to groups "that support the government" and said that President Evo Morales' goal of socialism does not coincide with "true indigenous" goals. End summary.

CONAMAQ Gives MAS a Pass

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¶2. (C) CONAMAQ publicly broke with the ruling MAS party in August 2007 over differences in the Constituent Assembly. Five MAS representatives in the Assembly are also CONAMAQ members, and after their dispute with the MAS block, the MAS formed a commission to judge the "rebels" in its midst (note: the 'rebellion' of certain indigenous MAS assembly members weakened the MAS ability to obtain a two-thirds majority. End note.) CONAMAQ's objections to MAS positions in the Assembly included what they saw as a "betrayal" of indigenous goals such as a plurinational state and direct representation in Congress.

Still Standing By Evo, At Least Publicly

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¶3. (C) Although the decision to eliminate the proposed indigenous quota in the Congress was reportedly made by President Evo Morales himself, CONAMAQ and other indigenous groups have taken pains not to publicly criticize Bolivia's first indigenous president. In interviews and press statements, CONAMAQ has said that it supports Evo's presidency and the work he is doing but has called for

changes in Evo's advisors (for example, CONAMAQ has demanded the replacement of the President of the Constituent Assembly and the majority of Evo's cabinet.) In August, CONAMAQ leader Martin Condori was quoted as saying, "The President is good, but those who are a problem are Vice President Alvaro Garcia Linera and (Minister of the Presidency) Juan Ramon Quintana, because while Evo gives one message, they change and give another message, another thought. They are not in the real world."

Questioning Evo's Indigenous-focus

14. (C) Privately, however, CONAMAQ seems to be losing patience with Evo. During our meeting, emboff pointed out a picture at a recent ceremony in which Evo celebrated the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples with local indigenous groups and Nobel Peace Prize winner Rigoberta Menchu (an indigenous Guatemalan.) The event was full of great photo-ops, but Colquechuima bitterly commented that Evo had not used the opportunity to address "real indigenous" issues. According to Colquechuima, Evo handed out Venezuelan checks to the local government, not to local indigenous groups, and Evo did not discuss the UN Declaration at all. Colquechuima complained that implementing the UN Declaration, particularly in regards to indigenous rights over natural resources and territory, would require massive changes in Bolivian law that "the MAS doesn't want." Ending the discussion of the ceremony, Colquechuima said that CONAMAQ had attended but that they felt "used" as part of Evo's public relations campaign.

Movement Toward Socialism, not Indigenism

15. (C) Colquechuima repeatedly pointed out that, although Evo based his election campaign and much of his public appeal on his indigenous background, his goals as a politician are not in sync with the goals of indigenous groups such as CONAMAQ. Recent MAS moves increasing centralization in the economy and natural resources sector are clearly socialist and not indigenist. Colquechuima emphasized one of CONAMAQ's main points during its August rupture with the MAS: that CONAMAQ is not a social organization but rather the government of an indigenous nation with its own territory, laws and customs. (Comment: Although the MAS has proposed indigenous autonomies, possibly in an attempt to weaken the power of the Departments which also want autonomy, Colquechuima suggested that the MAS in the end does not want to give any real power to decentralized indigenous "nations". End comment.) Although CONAMAQ is very pleased with the UN Declaration, Colquechuima said that he fears the implementing laws will never be passed because of MAS opposition to decentralization and unwillingness to give up territory and control over natural resources.

Show Them the Money...or a Constitution

16. (C) Colquechuima also complained that the Venezuelan money that comes from Evo only goes to groups that support the MAS. Colquechuima listed a number of projects in CONAMAQ's member communities but said that they cannot get an audience to even request some of the Venezuelan largess. Colquechuima said that the MAS is trying to "manage" the indigenous issue, using speeches and money to distract indigenous groups from what CONAMAQ feels are the real issues. As expected, considering CONAMAQ's protests over the Constituent Assembly in August, Colquechuima is pessimistic about the future of the Constituent Assembly, saying that the MAS is trying to impose its will while the opposition is trying to block any progress toward a new constitution.

Comment

17. (C) In a country where the majority of citizens consider themselves indigenous, trying to represent "indigenous

"issues" would be nearly impossible for any politician, considering the diversity of opinions and desires within the majority group. It is not unexpected therefore that cracks are beginning to show in Evo's "indigenous" support-base. Although MAS leadership has declared that CONAMAQ and other dissenting indigenous groups are not the "foundation" of the MAS party, in fact much of Evo's popularity is based on his ties--real or perceived--with the indigenous identity and indigenous issues. As Evo begins to have trouble with groups who have traditionally formed part of his base (cooperative miners and indigenous groups, for example), he may need to rely more on his ultimate support-network: the cocaleros. The Bolivian people voted for their first indigenous president in a vote for change--whether they will continue to support a president who is less indigenous and more cocalero remains to be seen. End Comment.

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